Specialty Independent Review Organization

Notice of Independent Review Decision

Date notice sent to all parties: 3/5/2016

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE:
The item in dispute is the prospective medical necessity of a lumbar transforaminal epidural steroid injection with fluoroscopy at left L5-S1 as an outpatient.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR EACH PHYSICIAN OR OTHER HEALTH CARE PROVIDER WHO REVIEWED THE DECISION:
The reviewer is a Medical Doctor who is board certified in Anesthesiology.

REVIEW OUTCOME:

Upon independent review, the reviewer finds that the previous adverse determination/adverse determinations should be:

☒ Upheld (Agree)

☐ Overturned (Disagree)

☐ Partially Overturned (Agree in part/Disagree in part)

The reviewer agrees with the previous adverse determination regarding the prospective medical necessity of a lumbar transforaminal epidural steroid injection with fluoroscopy at left L5-S1 as an outpatient.

PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY [SUMMARY]:
The patient is a male who sustained an injury on XX/XX/XX with the subsequent diagnoses of spondylosis and allied disorders, pain in the thoracic spine, lumbago, unspecified myalgia and myositis, post-traumatic headache brachial neuritis or radiculitis unspecified, cervical root disorders, radiculopathy of the cervical region and radiculopathy in the lumbar region. Current medications include baclofen, cyclobenzaprine, dulera, furosemide, gabapentin, losartan, spironolactone, and venlafaxine. Previous treatment includes physical therapy, TENS unit, NSAIDs, chiropractic management, pain medication, and lumbar epidural steroid injections. The claimant reported that the physical therapy provided temporary benefit and also that the chiropractic treatments, NSAIDs, and lumbar ESIs were effective but provided only temporary benefit.

Physical exam revealed antalgic gait and having difficulty in standing. The physical exam of the cervical spine revealed marked limitation in range of motion secondary to pain, and positive Spurling's test. The physical exam of the right upper extremity revealed tingling and numbness following C6 and C7 nerve dermatome distribution. The physical exam of the lumbosacral spine revealed tenderness along the lower lumbar spine, moderate reduced range of motion and positive straight leg test bilaterally. The physical exam of the bilateral lower extremities revealed radicular pain following L5 nerve dermatome distribution. The MRI of the lumbar spine revealed severe bilateral neural foraminal L5 S1. The MRI of the cervical spine revealed severe stenosis of Wright C-4 and C5 and C6 and see seven bilaterally.

ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF THE DECISION INCLUDE CLINICAL BASIS, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS USED TO SUPPORT THE DECISION:

The claimant is reporting radicular lumbar pain which has been unresponsive to physical therapy, rehabilitation and medication use. The provider has noted that there have been previous lumbar epidural steroid injections performed; however, they only provided temporary benefit. Repeat injections are not supported per guideline criteria without at least 50 to 70% pain relief for 6 to 8 weeks. As there has been no documented significant improvement from prior injections, medical necessity has not been established for lumbar epidural steroid injection.

Official Disability Guidelines-Treatment for Workers' Compensation, Online Edition
Chapter: Lumbar and Thoracic (Acute and Chronic)
Summary of Guideline: Epidural steroid injections (ESIs), therapeutic criteriens for the use of ESIs: Note: the purpose of ESI is to reduce pain and inflammation, air by facilitating progress and more active treatment programs, reduction of medication use in avoiding surgery, but this treatment alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit.

Note: The purpose of ESI is to reduce pain and inflammation, thereby facilitating progress in more active treatment programs, reduction of medication use and avoiding surgery, but this treatment alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit.

(1) Radiculopathy (due to herniated nucleus pulposus, but not spinal stenosis) must be documented. Objective findings on examination need to be present. Radiculopathy must be corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic testing.

(2) Initially unresponsive to conservative treatment (exercises, physical methods, NSAIDs, muscle relaxants & neuropathic drugs).

(3) Injections should be performed using fluoroscopy (live x-ray) and injection of contrast for guidance.

(4) Diagnostic Phase: At the time of initial use of an ESI (formally referred to as the “diagnostic phase” as initial injections indicate whether success will be obtained with this treatment intervention), a maximum of one to two injections should be performed. A repeat block is not recommended if there is inadequate response to the first block (< 30% is a standard placebo response). A second block is also not indicated if the first block is accurately placed unless: (a) there is a question of the pain generator; (b) there was possibility of inaccurate placement; or (c) there is evidence of multilevel pathology. In these cases a different level or approach might be proposed. There should be an interval of at least one to two weeks between injections.

(5) No more than two nerve root levels should be injected using transforaminal blocks.

(6) No more than one interlaminar level should be injected at one session.

(7) Therapeutic phase: If after the initial block/blocks are given (see “Diagnostic Phase” above) and found to produce pain relief of at least 50-70% pain relief for at least 6-8 weeks, additional blocks may be supported. This is generally referred to as the “therapeutic phase.” Indications for repeat blocks include acute exacerbation of pain, or new onset of radicular symptoms. The general consensus recommendation is for no more than 4 blocks per region per year. (CMS, 2004) (Boswell, 2007)

(8) Repeat injections should be based on continued objective documented pain relief, decreased need for pain medications, and functional response.

(9) Current research does not support a routine use of a “series-of-three” injections in either the diagnostic or therapeutic phase. We recommend no more than 2 ESI injections for the initial phase and rarely more than 2 for therapeutic treatment.

(10) It is currently not recommended to perform epidural blocks on the same day of treatment as facet blocks or sacroiliac blocks or lumbar sympathetic blocks or trigger point injections as this may lead to improper diagnosis or unnecessary treatment.

(11) Cervical and lumbar epidural steroid injection should not be performed on the same day. (Doing both injections on the same day could result in an excessive dose of steroids, which can be dangerous, and not worth the risk for a treatment that has no long-term benefit.)

A DESCRIPTION AND THE SOURCE OF THE SCREENING CRITERIA OR OTHER CLINICAL BASIS USED TO MAKE THE DECISION:

- ☐ **ACOEM- AMERICAN COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE UM KNOWLEDGEBASE**
- ☐ **AHCPR- AGENCY FOR HEALTHCARE RESEARCH & QUALITY GUIDELINES**
- ☐ **DWC- DIVISION OF WORKERS COMPENSATION POLICIES OR GUIDELINES**
- ☐ **EUROPEAN GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF CHRONIC LOW BACK PAIN**
- ☐ **INTERQUAL CRITERIA**
- ☒ **MEDICAL JUDGEMENT, CLINICAL EXPERIENCE, AND EXPERTISE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ACCEPTED MEDICAL STANDARDS**
- ☐ **MERCY CENTER CONSENSUS CONFERENCE GUIDELINES**
- ☐ **MILLIMAN CARE GUIDELINES**
- ☒ **ODG- OFFICIAL DISABILITY GUIDELINES & TREATMENT GUIDELINES**
- ☐ **PRESSLEY REED, THE MEDICAL DISABILITY ADVISOR**
- ☐ **TEXAS GUIDELINES FOR CHIROPRACTIC QUALITY ASSURANCE & PRACTICE PARAMETERS**
- ☐ **TEXAS TACADA GUIDELINES**
- ☐ **TMF SCREENING CRITERIA MANUAL**
- ☐ **PEER REVIEWED NATIONALLY ACCEPTED MEDICAL LITERATURE (PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION)**
- ☐ **OTHER EVIDENCE BASED, SCIENTIFICALLY VALID, OUTCOME FOCUSED GUIDELINES (PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION)**